SAME SEX ACTIVITY IN THE ROMAN CATECHISM

An Essay

Date: August, 2025
Number of words: 14,728
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To The Hesitating Reader

If philosophy's myths to philosophy's truth,
Pros and cons with right and wrong,
Traditionalism, existentialism and hidden wonder,
If wisdom, Gnosticism and things unknown;
In all their human thought retold,
But not exactly in the ancient way,
Can please, as in my day,
The wiser youngsters of to-day:
– So be it, and read on!

If not; If studious youth no longer craves,
That ancient light recast,
Plato, Aristotle and Thomas of Aquino,
Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.
– So be it. And may we,
In all our ignorance share the graves,
Where these and all their musings lie!

(With a tip o' the hat to Robert Louis Stevenson)

SAME SEX ACTIVITY IN THE ROMAN CATECHISM

A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION

This is a critical philosophical essay concerning a topic within moral *theology*, or how one ought to experience the good life. Following the mind of Bernard Häring, I offer a critique of the "casuistic and legalistic moral theology [which] sprang to a large extent from a mainly institutional and static conception of the Church, and crystallized and confirmed that conception."[1] That crystallized conception of moral theology ultimately resulted in dogmatic theology as promulgated within the Roman Catechism. I believe Karl Rahner's insight identifies a contemporary problem for theological philosophy. He wrote. "*Living* dogmatic theology is also always a 'philosophical' work, for any particular conception of man and the world is expressed principally in the prevailing philosophy of the age, while dogmatic theology speaks in human terms (just as revelation itself does)" [my italics].[2] As a quick review of current LGBTQ+ literature shows most informed writers approach this topic in light of a social criticism that is in accord with the principles of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*. My approach to sexuality in this essay is presented in light of the direction that Western philosophy took after World War I asking itself the question: "What does it mean to be a human being?"[3] I began thinking about LGBTQ+ issues a number of years back and in 2011 I put my thoughts to paper in a book about one's religious consciousness and one's Catholic faith. It was entitled, *Faith and Queer*

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[1] *Encyclopedia of Theology*: *The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, 1986. (K. Rahner, ed.) Burns and Oates, s. v. "moral theology."

[2] *Encyclopedia of Theology*. s. v. "dogma." Further, J. J. Rolbiecki notes: "In the history of Christianity dogmas have come to mean definition of revealed truths proposed by the supreme authority of the Church as articles of faith which must be accepted by all its members." *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 1963. (Dagobert Runes, ed.) Littlefield, Adams, s. v. "dogma."

[3] Cf. Kobler, John. (2000). "Vatican II's Pastoral Theology Needs Philosophy" in *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. 78, issue 1. (pp. 89-95). https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman20007816

Consciousness: Philosophical Thinking in a New Key. This paper is a continuation of my thinking and undertaken from within an anthropological perspective.

As mentioned, a perusal of the theological, philosophical and political literature concerning same sex activity reveals that the vast majority of research is written from the pastoral perspective set forth in *Gaudium et Spes*. In this easy, I approach the topic of same sex activity in the hope of a possible re-interpretation of Christian doctrine and dogma as revealed in scripture and currently interpreted by the magisterium of the Church. My hope is rooted in the Catholic Christian tradition but such hope is also evident in the Churches of the Reformation, the Orthodox Churches, and all subsequent Christian communities. While my topic is primarily theological, I consciously consider the contributions made by Christian philosophers and scientific thinkers to contemporary theological interpretation. There are five parts to this essay, 1) A Philosophical Introduction, 2) A Criticism of Chastity in the Roman Catechism, 3) The Social Composition of the Catechism, 4), The Relation of Doctrine and Dogma to the Roman Catechism and 5) Dogma and the Faithful "Third Man." Each addresses a particular perspective applicable to the re-interpretation of doctrine and dogma as currently understood by the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

A religious task for contemporary philosophy is to question the underlying assumptions and values of an ecclesial teaching authority such as the magisterium of the Catholic Church. As manuals on the Christian life, catechisms have undergone an evolutionary development in their focus and scope. Jacques Audinet has made some interesting observations about the notion of catechesis. He has noted that the noun form of the word is not known to the New Testament authors and that no particular written form (scroll or book) of catechetical teaching is indicated by the use of the word. "The choice of the word merely emphasizes that it is oral and that it is the handing on of what has been received." Eventually catechisms in written form appeared and the "catechism as an institution, no less than the study of the catechism-book, proved inadequate to maintain the living word in the Christian community."[4] Within the believing community, Audinet

[4] *Encyclopedia of Theology*. s. v. "catechesis."

maintains that through various stages of development the catechisms aimed at presenting a doctrinal synthesis appropriate to the age. To date, the Roman Catechism is the clearest presentation of a universal doctrinal synthesis. Further, the Roman Catechism was intended to be a syllabus of what the faithful need to hear and understand as they matured in the faith. As well, the catechism is intended by its framers to appear as self-evidently worthwhile when read by non-Catholics. It is intended to have mass appeal among nations of the earth since its contents transcend cultural limitations, that is, the Roman Catechism is ultimately an interpretation of revelation for all human kind. Thus, from an historical perspective the Roman Catechism reinforces the Catholic claim to universality.

The Roman Catechism has been composed within a revealed study field of human nature which has conceived humanity as living in a fallen world. If there were no "Fall from Grace" there would be no need for a catechism. The catechism is actually heir to a theologically dystopian world. Given this perspective the catechism asks the faithful to weight the options in their behavior as inhabitants in a complex moral environment. The Roman Catechism addresses a higher form of religious culture which is supported by classical Western philosophy. The catechism is best understood as a dynamic process of education which unfolds gradually rather than as a list of dictated norms and propositions. For the purposes of this essay, I inquire into a number of emerging newly interpretive perspectives in the social development of sex, gender and moral theology with respect to a changing understanding of chastity. I suggest that the Roman Catechism allows for the faithful to determine their own personal interpretation of magisterial teaching, but only up to a certain degree.

Not envisioned in the catechism are posthuman themes of social and intellectual development. What does it mean to press beyond the limits of human corporality or classical spirituality? How do the faithful understand the extensions of human experience made possible through new techno-digital advancements? The catechism is intended as an aid to the faithful to solve the problem of moral

choices. Both popular and critical discourses concerning human experience require that social and intellectual developments be taken into consideration when referencing the Roman catechism. That is a need to question underlying assumptions and ideologies within the catechism. Such questioning extends the reach of the catechism beyond its own limited self-interests of personal salvation. The modern church is not divided into an *ecclesia docens* (a teaching church) and an *ecclesia discerns* (a learning church) as George Tyrrell has pointed out. According to Ellen Leonard, Tyrrell noted that: "In the beginning there had been not a teaching Church and a learning Church, but a teaching Church and a learning world."[5] A well designed catechism ought to teach the faithful, as a pilgrim church living in the world, how to reach the particular moral goal concerning their eternal salvation. Thus, in this enterprise of living the morally good life the catechism reflects a relationship between the teaching church and the learning world. From a philosophical perspective the reverse is equally true. The church "learns" from a "teaching" world. Over time a catechism will engender trust in its directives because the faithful receive the necessary information and feedback to live the Christian life during their pilgrimage on earth.

When "the taught" are members of the Church, the catechism reveals a complex tension between its faithful promoters and its faithful recipients which opens up an experience of co-creativeness affecting all members within the Church. It is clear that a hetero-normative approach dominates all instruction in the Roman catechism. In its synthesis of Christian doctrine, the catechism is struggling to eliminate particular negative experiences in human sexual conventions. However, its failure to bring about change leaves the faithful to fall back on a traditional philosophical and theological past as a satisfactory blueprint for the future. The catechism displays an inability to imagine social relationships outside the Western traditional philosophical experience and political expression. Thus, from a philosophical perspective, I suggest that the framers of the Roman Catechism

[5] Leonard, Ellen (1982). *George Tyrrell and the Catholic Tradition*. Darton, Longman and Todd (p. 122).

need to revise their understanding of contemporary sociological and techno-digital advancements which, to them, exhibit an undesirable control of nature in ways unacceptable to traditional cultural norms.

It is to be remembered that the Roman Catechism has been crafted within a Christian anthropocentricism which considers humanity to be the summit of the evolutionary process. Presuming this is correct, cannot the faithful, as informed agents, be entrusted to develop future interpretive narratives different from those of their inherited past? That is to say can the catechism be modified, or re-created, by its users in concert with the current authoritative agency of the Church? Thus, in a truly democratic fashion the "users" would not simply "do as they are told," but rather create an appropriate set of norms that meet the needs of contemporary society in light of Christian principles. Such a co-creative role would define, in fact, what it means to be human within a non-hierarchical religious institution in a techno-digital (non-enchanted) world. The astute reader will no doubt realize that this view is contrary to the dogmatic understanding of the nature of the Church. Chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* reiterates that the governance of the Church is hierarchical. "This teaching on the institution, the permanence, the nature and the force of the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching office, the scared synod proposes anew to be firmly believed by all the faithful."[6]

In light of contemporary ecclesial studies the specific question, "who wrote the Roman Catechism?" must be addressed. The answer is to be found in the initiative of the North American Bishops of the Catholic Church. At the 1985 Synod Intervention, Cardinal Bernard Law first suggested the drafting of a new catechism. The reason being that in a shrinking world, the various national catechisms did not fill the modern need for a clear articulation of the church's universal faith. Under Papal authority, twelve cardinals drafted a catechism that would clearly and concisely articulate the Catholic faith according to the

[6] Flannery, Austin (1996). *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican Council II*. Costello & Dominican Publications (p. 26).

understanding of Vatican II. On October 11th, 1992, the catechism was presented to the faithful and to the world. The Roman Catechism, being the result of a collaborative effort involving teams of experts was presented and accepted to all intents and purposes as universal doctrine yet reflecting a particular philosophical ideology. This was not unexpected by those philosophers and theologians promoting the development of the neo-Thomistic philosophy within the Roman Church. This was so because, "Catholic philosophical thought must be in some sense Thomistic, because the thought of St. Thomas enshrines certain fundamental truths which, precisely because they are true, are indispensably required as the foundation of Christian belief and are as eternally valid as Christian doctrine itself."[7] In this essay I question such "eternal validity" of classical Thomistic philosophy.

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A CRITICISM OF CHASTITY IN THE ROMAN CATECHISM

In this section I offer a philosophical commentary of the contents of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in English as available on the Vatican website. At this point it should be noted, I think, that other Christian bodies whose governance is not hierarchical do not generate catechisms as such. Rather, they are likely to produce "study guides" instead. A case in point is the *Talking about Homosexuality* manual which is self-styled as a "study tool for theological reflection around debates in the church that considers scripture, tradition, reason, and experience." Notably absent from this congregational manual is any mention of a "teaching authority" as is common to hierarchical traditions. [8] While social structures differ the experience remains the same. The topic of homosexuality in the Roman Catechism is treated in numbers 2357 to 2359 of the catechism. My

[7] Dewart, Leslie (1969). *The Foundations of Belief*. Herder and Herder (p. 502).
[8] *Holy Conversations: Talking About Homosexuality a Congregational Resource* (2005). Eds. Karen Oliveto, Kelly Turney, and Traci West. Pilgrim Press.

comments are prefaced by a bullet beginning with number 2337 under the heading, The Vocation to Chastity.

Link:

https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_three/section_two/chapter_two/article_6/ii_the_vocation_to_chastity.html

II. The Vocation to Chastity

2337 Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.

- Within the classical Western philosophical tradition, the notion of chastity pertains to the human person who is composed of two elements, matter and form, or in theological language, body and spirit. In modern Roman catechesis the material element is physical and the formal element is spiritual. The moral presumption is that a sexually, and psychologically integrated person will naturally exhibit a healthy mind and a healthy body.

<u>The integrity of the person</u>

2338 The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech.

- The chaste person is a "gifted" person in whom life has been placed. That is, theologically he or she is a passive recipient with the ability to live life

given by another agency. However, to be chaste means maintaining that a "right" sexual relationship is the person's responsibility.

2339 Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. "Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end."

- Here the catechism recalls the moral superiority of the human being within creation. That superiority is to be found in the human conscience which, in effect, entitles humanity to a certain degree of mastery over its environment. But along with that mastery of the environment there is the Christian notion of freedom of the person and stewardship of creation.

2340 Whoever wants to remain faithful to his baptismal promises and resist temptations will want to adopt the means for doing so: self-knowledge, practice of an ascesis adapted to the situations that confront him, obedience to God's commandments, exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer. "Indeed it is through chastity that we are gathered together and led back to the unity from which we were fragmented into multiplicity."

- There is a contested philosophical presumption here. It is the religious interpretation of evolution which views humanity as seeking a pre-existing unity which it has lost. Theologically known as humanity's Fall from Grace. In fact, experience and history show that the opposite is occurring, not unity but the plurality of existence. Diversity is perceived to be the ultimate end of humanity. Biological evolution, or natural evolution, has inspired an

understanding of cultural and anthropological evolution. And Leslie Dewart reminds us that "Nothing in evolution suggests that natural selection brings about a predetermined end, or even that it promotes any particular line of development."[9] Once begun, humanity directs its own evolution.

2341 The virtue of chastity comes under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason.

- This statement is a reflection of the influence of the thinking of St. Thomas on sexual matters which, in later times, gave rise to the popular slogan: "reason over passion." Thomas taught that there are four cardinal virtues upon which all others hinged; prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

2342 Self-mastery is a long and exacting work. One can never consider it acquired once and for all. It presupposes renewed effort at all stages of life. The effort required can be more intense in certain periods, such as when the personality is being formed during childhood and adolescence.

- Here one is reminded that in Catholic thinking one belongs to an imperfect "pilgrim" Church and perfection is never to be expected in this world.

2343 Chastity has laws of growth which progress through stages marked by imperfection and too often by sin. "Man . . . day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions; and so he knows, loves, and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth."

- There is a suggestion that the "natural order" is meant here by the notion of "laws of growth" as determining moral advancement.

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[9] Dewart, Leslie (1989). *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*. University of Toronto Press (p. 206).

2344 Chastity represents an eminently personal task; it also involves a cultural effort, for there is interdependence between personal betterment and the improvement of society." Chastity presupposes respect for the rights of the person, in particular the right to receive information and an education that respect the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life.

- This is a reminder that the individual person lives in community. Each has corresponding rights and responsibilities in the process of human advancement. Not to be omitted is the right to generate information, not merely receive it.

2345 Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The Holy Spirit enables one whom the water of Baptism has regenerated to imitate the purity of Christ.

- In this statement one is able to observe the legacy of the tension between the sinful body and the (regenerated) immaculate soul in Catholic soteriological doctrine. The body remains degenerate until the return of Christ.[10]

<u>The integrality of the gift of self</u>

2346 Charity is the form of all the virtues. Under its influence, chastity appears as a school of the gift of the person. Self-mastery is ordered to the gift of self. Chastity leads him who practices it to become a witness to his neighbor of God's fidelity and loving kindness.

- Charity is one of the three theological virtues in Catholic teaching. The other two are faith and hope.

[10] 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18.

2347 The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is a promise of immortality. Chastity is expressed notably in friendship with one's neighbor. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion.

- In the collective mind of the authors of the Roman Catechism (who likely had in mind pederasty when composing the catechism) intend here a "ritualized friendship" in light of the later remarks on homosexuality. As Gabriel Herman has noted: "From its first appearance in Homer … onwards, ritualized friendship has been abundantly attested in both Greek and Latin sources from all periods and areas of classical antiquity. In late antiquity, it disappears from view. There are good reasons to assume, however, that it was gradually annexed by the Christian Church, since it reappears in a new guise in the early medieval variants of godparenthood: Latin *compaternitas,* and Byzantine *synteknia.*[11] Herman's understanding may be read in contrast to G. Lowes Dickinson's view who wrote: "But the most remarkable instance of the deliberate dedication of this passion [i.e., friendship] to political and military ends is that of the celebrated 'Theban band,' a troop consisting exclusively of pairs of lovers, who marched and fought in battle side by side, and by their presence and example inspired one another to a courage so constant and high that 'it is stated that they were never beaten until the battle at Chaeronea: and when Philip, after the fight, took a view of the slain, and came to the place where the three hundred that fought his phalanx lay dead together, he wondered, and understanding that it was the band of lovers, he shed tears, and said, 'Perish any man who suspects that these men either did or suffered anything that was base.'"[12]

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[11] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (2004). Eds. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press s. v. "friendship, ritualized."
[12] *The Greek View of Life* (1932). Methuen (p. 185).

The various forms of chastity

2348 All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has "put on Christ," The model for all chastity. All Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. At the moment of his Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity.

- From a theological perspective in light of 2337, which seems to suggest a "human sexual biological universality," according to this statement it seems that that not all humanity is called to live an integrative sexuality as baptized Christians. In its dogmatic understanding *Lumen Gentium* notes that The People of God are taken out of the world. "The one people of God is accordingly present in all the nations of the earth, and takes its citizens from all nations, for a kingdom which is not earthly in character but heavenly."[13]

2349 "People should cultivate [chastity] in the way that is suited to their state of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable manner. Others live in the way prescribed for all by the moral law, whether they are married or single." Married people are called to live conjugal chastity; others practice chastity in continence: There are three forms of the virtue of chastity: the first is that of spouses, the second that of widows, and the third that of virgins. We do not praise any one of them to the exclusion of the others.... This is what makes for the richness of the discipline of the Church.

- Non-Christians, being not "gifted" with the virtue should cultivate chastity as an "ethical" virtue contingent upon their circumstances. This understanding, and that contained in 2350, reflect the presumed special favour of chastity as gift within the Christian life. William Roberts, a lay theologian, has written an article, "Christian Marriage: A Divine Calling"

[13] Flannery. *Vatican II*, (p. 18).

which given my understanding confirms the divine aspect of Christian chastity. In contrast, John Collins, in the same publication has written "Marriage in the Old Testament." He states that "unlike Christian marriage, in ancient Israel the union of a man and wife was not considered a sacrament and was not sanctified by a public act."[14] Being a non-sacramental act, but merely a natural one, only ethical (contractual) norms of conduct are necessary.

2350 Those who are engaged to marry are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity, and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity.

- Stated as a Christian value this observation could be equally made of Jewish and Muslim marriages, it seems to me.

<u>Offenses against chastity</u>

2351 Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

- Note that in this context "disordered," which is a 20th century term, carried a clinical mental health meaning which applied to the act of homosexuality. Currently, the term focuses on human desire in light of contemporary psychological understanding.[15] This number affirms the two necessary

[14] *Marriage in the Catholic Tradition*: *Scripture*, *Tradition and Experience* (2004). Eds. Todd Salzman, Thomas Kelly and John O'Keefe. Crossroad, Herder and Herder (p. 12).

[15] "On December 15, 1973, the trustees of the American Psychiatric Association dropped homosexuality from the list of recognized mental disorders. They suggested, in effect, that homosexuality be no longer considered a mental illness but rather a form of sexual disorientation that requires treatment only when the individual concerned is disturbed by it. They created a

purposes of sexual activity according to Roman tradition; procreation and unity.

2352 By masturbation is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. “Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.” “The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.” For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of "the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved.” To form an equitable judgment about the subjects’ moral responsibility and to guide pastoral action, one must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability.

- After reiterating a contemporary clinical perspective on masturbation, the framers of the catechism attempt a psychological rational of the practice in light of personal immaturity. The Western psychological perspective has an influence on the moral perspective of the catechism’s teaching. As the study of human sexuality by the Catholic Theological Society of America notes: “Scientific research and recent discoveries in medicine and psychology have brought to light the need to modify traditional preconceptions on a number of counts.”[16]

2353 Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is

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new category, namely, ‘sexual disorientation disturbance.’” Kosnik, A., Carroll, W., Cunningham, A., Modras, R., Schulte, J. (eds). *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (1977). Paulist Press (p. 70).

[16] *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (p. 199).

naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young.

- What is significant to note here is that the traditional understanding of the issue of fornication is recognized only between unmarried males and unmarried females. It is canonically distinguishable from adultery which concerns the married state.

2354 Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.

- The "objectification" of sexual activity is the focus in this number from a political perspective since it is a dehumanizing act intended for illicit gain. It is more a matter for the civil authorities to regulate, than an ecclesial matter of moral transgression.

2355 Prostitution does injury to the dignity of the person who engages in it, reducing the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure. the one who pays sins gravely against himself: he violates the chastity to which his Baptism pledged him and defiles his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Prostitution is a social scourge. It usually involves women, but also men, children, and adolescents (The latter two cases involve the added sin of scandal.) While it is always gravely sinful to engage in prostitution, the imputability of the offense can be attenuated by destitution, blackmail, or social pressure.

- Theologically, prostitution is a "temple violation" of the human body which houses the Holy Spirit. Note also that prostitution is envisioned negatively as a "social scourge."

2356 Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.

- With the words "always an intrinsically evil act" the catechism clearly envisions that there is no justification for rape. Nor are the negative psychological effects of rape are not to be overlooked.

Chastity and homosexuality

2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

- The classical perspective of homosexual acts being contrary to natural law is maintained here. However, homosexuality may be envisioned positively as a *relational* issue among persons, not one of being constitutive of an individual person. Any psychological cause has yet to be determined

according to the catechism. And the interpretation of scripture remains the basis for the moral interpretation of homosexual acts. On catechetical authority further interpretation of homosexuality is closed. I would ask: does the catechism have authority over the magisterium, or the magisterium authority over the catechism?

2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

- I understand this number as basically an affirmation of the "hate the sin; love the sinner" approach to the issue.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

- Simply put, in the teaching of the catechism, homosexual activity remains incompatible with the Roman Catholic theological understanding of chastity.

§

THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE CATECHISM

This understanding of religious knowledge (i.e. the catechism) appeals to ecclesial orthodoxy in the Christian tradition. The orthodox doctrine and dogma of an

ecclesial body requires an understanding of the genesis of its social development. A classical philosophical appreciation, of itself, is not sufficient for an adequate interpretation in the 21st Century and beyond. As Auguste Sabatier has so aptly noted: "The error of that form of religious knowledge called *Orthodoxy* is that of forgetting the historically and psychologically conditioned character of all doctrines, and of desiring to raise into the absolute that which is born in time, and which must necessarily modify itself in order to live in time. Impotent to arrest the current of ideas and the movement of minds, it can only establish its rule by political measures, by regulations enacted and applied like civil laws — decisions of popes, bishops, or synods, trials for heresy, dogmatic tribunals. … Its misfortune and its failing is to be anti-historical."[17]

An Understanding of Theology within the Social Construction of Religion[18]

As a professional activity, contemporary theology began with the formation of the universities. Initially theology was undertaken informally within an ecclesiastical context, a vocational guild, as it were, and its purpose was to serve the Church in clarifying and formalizing doctrine and dogma. In this chapter, I view that theology is foundational to the social construction of religion, as well as, clarifying doctrine and dogma. My purpose then is to think theologically within a phenomenological interpretation of faith, but outside the guild of an ecclesiastical theology. Further, I undertake an ecclesial theology that refers to a communal relationship of Christian life, distinguished from the ecclesiastical life that refers to the historical governing structure of the Christian community. The doctrinal and dogmatic formulations extant in most ecclesiastical institutions presume a classical construction based on the historical experience of the church as a believing community. As a consequence, over the centuries various rhetorical accretions have clouded such theology, leading to a social construction of religion

[17] *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion: Based on Psychology and History* (1897). George H. Doran Co. (p. 338).

[18] The following section is a re-print that first appeared in *The Catholic Faith and the Social Construction of Religion: With Particular Attention to the Québec Experience*. Savage, Allan & Peter Stuart (2011). Westbow Press (pp. 7-12).

that no longer authentically relates to contemporary experience. In contrast, theological phenomenological reflection that takes place in an ecclesial context does relate to contemporary experience.

The way in which we conduct theological reflection outside of the traditional theological guild is through critical reflection. Critical theological reflection is a unique human activity and an innate capacity of the human mind. This innate, critical capacity reaches into the depths of the mind and into its consciousness and reflects upon an Other. Critical theological reflection discloses the best collective efforts of believers in co-creating an authentic Christian anthropology, or put another way the understanding of human life that enables the human species to evolve in its social construction of religion. An active critical reflection in theology has at least three characteristics. First, critical reflection must relate to actual experience. Second, it is to disclose truth within a social relationship. And third, it is to serve the community.

To that end, I reflect upon our collective experience and incorporate such reflection into theological thinking outside the traditional philosophical mold of the ecclesiastical guild. Thus, I reject the form of expression of an earlier Medieval Christian theology, influenced as it is by out-dated Aristotelian categories. These categories lack resonance with contemporary cosmology as noted by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.[19] Additionally, by reflecting outside the guild, I avoid the baggage of disputed ecclesiastical political and power-related issues that emerged in the Reformation/counter-Reformation period, but which are no longer relevant. The way is thus opened for new investigations for theological reflection in a new social construction of religion in our contemporary context. However, despite my reluctance to embrace the past, in investigating religious experience, as a theologian, I must take seriously the notion that the Enlightenment period which began in Europe has introduced by virtue of its

[19] Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre (1957). *Le Milieu Divin*. Collins (p. 40).

epistemological, historical, and evolutionary development, a variety of legitimate expressions of religious experience.

In North America, given our historical patrimony, we continue to be plagued in our theological thinking by problems traceable to the philosophical and theological context prevalent in pre-Victorian England. During this time and, well into the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901, England remained virtually isolated from Continental philosophical thought. However, critical examination of English philosophical and theological texts does reveal some influence of German thought. At the beginning of the 19th century Rationalism was in vogue in England and on the Continent. Elliot-Binns distinguishes two strains of rational thought that were hostile to religious and, in particular, Christian thought. One train of thought was open and complete rejection of the whole Christian system that was typical of France; the other train of thought, which was typified in Germany tolerated Christianity, but gradually reduced it to mere caricature of its former self.[20] Thus, the existential and less rationalist German thought that later evolved into phenomenological philosophy under the influence of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) resonated with the English theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909). Although he died before any formal development of the phenomenological school of thought in England, his thinking was definitely heading in this direction.

In his phenomenological way of thinking, W. K. C. Guthrie reminds us that philosophers do not think in a void. In fact, our thoughts are products of three interrelated factors: our temperaments, our experiences, and our reading of previous philosophers, all of which make up our life-world.[21] One of the pioneers of the phenomenological method of philosophical thinking was Edmund Husserl. For him individuals can reflect on all experience as it presents itself to consciousness according to a clear, existential, and methodological framework.

[20] Elliot-Binns, L. E. (1964). *Religion in the Victorian Era*. Lutterworth Press (p. 133).
[21] Guthrie, W. K. C. (1975). *The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle*. Harper Torchbooks (p. 19).

Thus, all phenomenological knowledge appears within a complex series of cultural presentments. Phenomenology, as an interpretive philosophy, considers that the world of conscious "lived" experience takes precedence over the abstracted and theoretical world of the sciences. Langdon Gilkey notes that from a personal perspective, the public task of the theologian is primarily the analysis of life with regard to religious issues and is secondarily an analysis of life with regard to its economic, sociological or psychological dimensions. Though each of these has a religious ground, he maintains.[22] Thus, to his way of thinking, an existential reflection the social construction of religion, although undertaken individually is not a private enterprise.

The theological approach in this chapter falls within Jeff Astley's understanding of doing "ordinary theology," which attends to personal insights arising out of experience and theological thinking that takes place outside the traditional guild. Yet, according to Astley, such original theology is rarely done. He maintains that theological thought today is often undertaken as the study of other people's ideas and is rarely a self-critical reflection on one's own religious experience and ideas.[23] Although modern theology may have begun in the academy, it cannot remain merely a theoretical academic subject, as John Apczynski has shown.[24] Theology, given its contemporary purpose, must address the questions and problems that arise from within all aspects of human society. The thought of any theologian and, in the final analysis, this means anyone trying to understand his or her own experience of ultimate meaning emerges from the *lebenswelt* (life-world) of the theologian. The theologian's *lebenswelt* is thus formed by the existential milieu, in Teilhard de Chardin's sense, of the cultural. social, and religious contexts of life.

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[22] Gilkey, Langdon (1985). "The role of the theologian in contemporary society" in *The Thought of Paul Tillich.* (Eds. J. L. Adams, and W. Pauck, and R. Shinn) Harper (p. 330-50).
[23] Astley, Jeff (2002). *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*. Ashgate.
[24] Apczynski, John (1999). *Theology and the University, 1987 Annual Publication of the College Theological Society*, Volume 33. University Press of America.

Theologians are continually searching for new and meaningful ways to reflect upon religious experience outside the traditional theological guild. One cannot accept the legacy of the past as hardened and dead with respect to the present any more than one can ignore the lives of those critical thinkers who have shaped the past. Although, they may be physically dead from the perspective of social construction of religion the legacy of these individuals continues to shape the present. Their legacy exists, not by virtue of its own historical right, but by virtue of its significance and importance to the present moment. The social construction of religion, from an ecclesial point of view, is greater than the insights of any theological guild. The social construction of religion must be in dialogue with artists, musicians, novelists poets, psychologists and, of necessity, with the scriptures.

> One thing which characterized the finer arts — poetry, painting, music — areas with which we are all familiar — for more than a century, but certainly for the past century, has been a continued insistence on their relevance to daily living. There has been quite an impressive chorus of urgent requests in all fields that we take seriously the arts as basic social factors of enlightenment and guidance and training.[25]

Thus, contemporary North American social construction of religion arising within the faith life of believers incorporates aspects of the human temperament, experience and understanding of both former believers and current thinkers.

Eventually, through time, the initial, diverse conceptualizations of church, or ecclesia, developed into various uniform theological understandings that reflected the norms for the religious life of the Catholic communities. For example, two diverging and distinct schools of theology, known as Alexandrian and Antiochene schools respectively, developed to address various Christological questions, based

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[25] McLuhan, Marshall (1999). *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion.* (Eds. Eric McLuhan, & Jack Szkiarek) Stoddart (p. 34).

on their respective geographical and intellectual differences. However, these schools were not homogeneous groups of thinkers. As Steenberg reminds us, homogeneous schools never existed in the concrete sense. Their understandings encompassed convergent themes and approaches, but never became a uniform system.[26] The existence of these schools indicated that diversity was an integral aspect of the social construction of religion for some time after the death of the apostles. As the social construction of the Christian religion evolved, the community began to interpret its experience and socially construct itself in a different fashion. Between the Judaic and Hellenistic world-views, a rapprochement prepared the way for a new articulation of the social construction of the Christian religion. No longer was the imminent return of Jesus the driving force for reflecting upon the social construction of the Christian religion. An interpretation of the social construction of religion which drew heavily on Hellenistic philosophical ideas began to develop, particularly in the Christian East and, it cast the social construction in a new light.

This development continued for centuries. As Brian Gaybba has pointed out, various schools of reflection on religious construction of the ecclesia were based on the Christian religious life and were developing long before the Reformation occurred.[27] These schools had developed intentionally to advance the priorities and perspectives of particular religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. In the Middle Ages, a change in the structure of the theological understanding about the social construction of religion occurred with the controversial introduction of Aristotle's philosophy. The subsequent scholastic method of interpretation that developed influenced by Aristotelian and Platonic thought patterns, was the best tool for intellectual argument in that age. This is evidenced by Thomas Aquinas's theologically constructed synthesis of Aristotle's cosmology and the Christian message. One of the consequences, often

[26] Steenberg, M. C. (2005). "The two 'schools' of Alexandria and Antioch categories, and classification and converging Christological visions," *Monachos Net* (http://www.monachos.net) Accessed 23 November 2010. [This site is not longer available.]

[27] Cf. Gaybba, Brian (1988). *Aspects of the Mediaeval History of Theology: 12th to 14th Centuries*. University of South Africa Press.

misunderstood, of this particular social construction was that Thomas relegated spiritual, or mystical, theology to a subdivision of moral theology. Eventually his inspired version of the social construction of religion became dominant in the Roman Catholic Church. It is significant that through the acceptance of Aristotle's cosmology, Christian theology allowed for a very "act-centred" message that was never fully realized, nor socially constructed, by the faithful. Consequently, reflection on the social construction of religion fell under various static legalisms. Schneiders points out that a socially constructed medieval synthesis held together until the middle of the 20th century, when the culture-shattering events of the two world wars, a technological revolution, liberation movements of all kinds, an explosion of knowledge and, rapid developments in philosophy, the humanities, psychology, as well as, other social sciences all brought the comprehensive hold of the medieval synthesis on the Christian mind and imagination to an end.[28]

Out of this new milieu, diverse theological ways of thinking have been socially constructed and now re-shape the hermeneutic of reflecting on the religious experience. The critical reflection on religious experience often leads one to ask: Is church membership a prerequisite for doing theology? Can one do theology outside the revelation in Christ? Concerning the religious social construction of the ecclesia it has been noted that some Christians saw and, continue to see, the Invisible Church within the Visible Church and somehow connected to it. Yet, the Invisible Church certainly is not identical, or co-extensive with the Visible Church. That "there are many souls within the Visible Church that do not belong to the Invisible Church; and there are many souls not within the Visible Church that belong to the Invisible Church is still a thoroughly orthodox and common saying," so notes Baron von Hügel.[29] Nevertheless, in understanding ordinary theology through a critical reflection on the Christian religious experience both theologians and religious philosophers need to somehow "enchurch" their thinking. That is, to socially construct the historically called community.

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[28] Schneiders, Sandra (1986). "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals or Partners?" *Horizons* 13, 2 (p. 270).

[29] von Hügel, Friedrich (1912). *Eternal Life: A Study of Its Implications and Applications*. T. & T. Clark (p.xiv).

Within a proper social construction of religion, love for God provides motivation for studying theology. Coming to understand the things of God out of love is the beginning and root of all theology. In short, theology is not a programme of studies with roots in the medieval universities. Brian Gaybba reminds us that the phenomenon of Liberation Theology is rooted in love.[30] Truth is the result of God's love for us and of our practical learning through a proper social construction of religion. It is possible that one may experience God's love outside of one's inherited social construction of religion. As I noted earlier, we are more likely to feel our relationship with God than to understand it. The Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel this truth and then formulate it through the social construction of religion. Once formulated, the Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel their way deeper into this truth.

It is worth noting that non-rational life feels, but does not formulate, nor socially construct its feelings. I suggest that the social construction of religion has two dimensions. One dimension consists of agreement and attraction, and the other dimension consists of dislike and revolt. Agreement and attraction, as well as, dislike and revolt, are dimensions of all communities. By way of example, the *Lex Orandi*, the rule of prayer, is a product of the community, not the individual. The *Lex Orandi* is the social construction of the community's religion, not of the individual's isolated experience. The social construction of religion acting as a public authority may set the criteria for religious truth, but it does not set the criteria for private judgment. However, for an individual's life to be healthy and bear spiritual fruit it must unfold within a community and be connected to the social construction of religion that constitutes the community's life. In each member the work of the spirit of holiness is manifested in the social construction of religion. With this background in place I now turn to the special characteristics of religious social construction.

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[30] "With the sure instinct given by Love, liberation theology has, whether it realizes it or not, retrieved the classic Augustinian tradition that only love gives full understanding of the things of God." Gaybba, Brian (1987). *The Spirit of Love*. Geoffey Chapman (p. 266).

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THE RELATION OF DOCTRINE AND DOGMA TO THE ROMAN CATECHISM

This section begins with the initial paragraph and the closing paragraph of Jack Bonsor's article.[31]

> I indicate the problematic character of Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology in view of evolutionary theory. Evolution of the human body is generally accepted. But what about human consciousness and intellect? Aquinas argued that humanity's intellectual functions require a subsistent, directly created soul. I suggest that the hypothesis of a subsistent and directly created soul is incommensurate with evolutionary theory and unnecessary. The major portion of this section treats an alternative explanation for the emergence of the human intellect. Leslie Dewart offers an explanation of how the human mind might have evolved.[32] My aim is not to offer Dewart's work as definitive; I simply suggest that there are good reasons for adopting anthropological perspectives different from that of Aquinas. If such anthropologies can find a place in Catholic discourse, a space is opened for reconsidering the judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. The final section of the article considers some possibilities consequent on this opening.
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> Finally, let me assure the reader that I am not so naive as to think my suggestions on this topic will be widely embraced. But it seems to me unreasonable to grant Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology an

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[31] "Homosexual Orientation and Anthropology: Reflections on the Category 'Objective Disorder.'" *Theological Studies* 59 (1998, pp. 60-83).

[32] Bosnor is referring to Leslie Dewart's, *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (University of Toronto Press, 1989).

> unquestioned hegemony within Catholic discourse. I entitled this last section "Possibilities." I have in mind the possibility of thinking about human nature in a manner consistent with contemporary science, the possibility of building theological anthropologies from within this perspective, the possibility of rethinking the CDF's [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] judgment that homosexual orientation is objectively disordered, and the possibility of reconsidering ecclesial opposition to public structures that support homosexual persons. Finally, I have in mind the possibility that the authentic love of homosexual persons might indeed be a gift within the provident care of God.

Philosophical Preliminaries

I begin this reflection not on the *theological* significance of same sex activity as being sinful in Roman Catholic teaching, but from a *philosophical* perspective examining the support for the church's teaching. In short, I offer criticism from the perspective of a *Theological Philosophy*[33] with the intent of deepening theological insight into the understanding of homosexual activity as presented in the Roman Catechism and the Declaration of Sexual Ethics of 1976. My reflections are intended to encourage further considerations of the adequacy of the church's present teaching for the 21st Century and beyond. But first, I maintain, there must be a corresponding insight into the philosophical principles supporting Catholic theology. I stated this conviction in 2012 in the opening sentence of my book, *The "Avant-Garde" Theology of George Tyrrell: Its Philosophical Roots Changed My Theological Thinking* in which I wrote: "My contention for many years has been that theological problems are first, and principally, philosophical problems and need to be addressed as such."

[33] I follow Leslie Dewart's thinking. "I believe that *Theological Philosophy*, which is my own preference, may be at least as good as any of the more usual expressions, and I hope that this coinage will gain favour and come to fill a useful role in the contemporary Christian academic world." *The Foundations of Belief* (p. 11).

Theology is the primary object of this section and I, the subject, undertake this reflection philosophically. That is to say, I do the organizing and interpretation of my experiences but within the mind-set of an ecclesial authority. Subsequently, I offer my conclusions for general review. With respect to my sexual understanding, I do not find myself in a situation that is foreign to me, nor imposed upon me by another. As an independently thinking philosophical agent, I fashion my own philosophical perspective of this world. In that regard I have conceived a certain philosophical vision of what it means to be human in our increasingly techno-digital world. My experience reveals that I have a certain degree of "creative freedom" within my environment. I am not merely a predetermined creature among all the others that make up the universe. My capacity to fashion my environment creatively essentially reflects, to some degree, a divine capacity not characteristic of other life forms.

In my philosophical perspective I admit that many individuals hold that there is an "absolute consciousness," which is traditionally understood as God. That being the case, an absolute consciousness is beyond the reach of any finite (human) experience. Therefore, Revelation notwithstanding and given my limited philosophical speculation, as I envision "absolute consciousness" there is no need for it to be motivated by anything outside itself. It is not regulated by any laws, nor conditioned by any historical circumstances. Absolute consciousness has no restraining structures within which it must disclose itself. It can only be known to the extent that it freely discloses itself to and in the human world. That there is an absolute consciousness is, in fact, a matter of faith, not philosophy. My thinking on this point has been influenced by Stephan Strasser.[34] However, unlike Strasser, I depart from traditional doctrine and dogma and suggest that "absolute consciousness" as an entity possesses no agency in the affairs of humanity. The only interpretive agent with any consciousness of the affairs of humanity is humanity itself upon whose limited consciousness the absolute consciousness has

[34] *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences: A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal*. Duquesne University Press (1963:54).

been modeled. I think it is opportune at this point to recall Ludwig Feuerbach's words. "Religion, at least the Christian, is the relation of man to himself, or more correctly to his own nature (i.e., his substantive nature); but a relation to it, viewed as a nature apart from his own. The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective — i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature."[35] Further, one contemporary author has offered a different perspective on Feuerbach's theme. Beni Issembert has provided this abstract to his essay, "From God to AI: The Inverted Image of Man."[36]

> This essay ventures that humanity, having long projected God in its own image, now constructs a new, perhaps more potent, instituting figure: artificial intelligence. The divine, I argue, historically functioned as an interpretive, metaphorical, and stabilizing projection. AI, in stark contrast, emerges as a transformative agent, actively reshaping human behavior, affect, and identity. Where the divine image offered a symbolic means for self-reflection, AI presents a prescriptive mirror – one that configures rather than merely reflects. This marks a radical reversal in our anthropological genesis: humanity, no longer the sole author of its image, increasingly becomes the effect of its own technical progeny. Drawing on Greek and Hindu philosophical traditions, alongside the critical lens of thinkers like Günther Anders, this paper interrogates the ontological and ethical reverberations of this profound shift.

As humans we receive life, but generate our own beliefs. Philosophically, Western humanity has left the mythical era of the interpretation of the meaning of life. The historical approach to the meaning of life represented a decisive advancement in philosophical thinking. The advent of historical understanding is nothing less than an evolutionary phase in contemporary critical understanding. History reveals the

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[35] *The Essence of Christianity* (1957) [1841]. Trans. George Eliot. Harper Brothers (p. 14).
[36] Accessed through *www.academia.edu* (July, 2025.)

development of regional customs and ethical perspectives, which some authorities attempt to universalize, making them obligatory for all. Even a cursory knowledge of Roman ecclesiastical history will reveal as much. Despite the increasing awareness of a plurality of advanced higher cultures, there remains in the minds of many thinkers an uncritical counter-current of mythological or legendary thinking which traditionalists hold on to in spite of the epistemological and scientific advancements in modern thinking. Such reluctance calls to the philosopher's mind the decision of the Council of Trent (1545-63) that tradition and scripture are individual interpretive authorities that may not be set one against the other. In fact, the Council recognized these two modes of interpretation as arising from a single source, i.e., God. However, tradition is always to be subordinated to the scriptures in contested matters of interpretation. That is to say that concerning disputed issues, "in the last resort [the Council of Trent] gave the Church alone the right to judge of the texts, and the interpretation to be put on them."[37] In light of the philosophical perspective that I present here, a correct interpretation of scripture over tradition is highly significant in light of the current LGBTQ+ political agenda and an ecclesial understanding.

Within contemporary philosophical perspectives it is the task of the ecclesiastical corporation to offer to the faithful a meaningful vision and interpretation of the facts of religious experience. Because of the conscious collaboration of the philosopher and theologian, the theologian is able to gain deeper insight into the meaning of a religious personhood. Such deeper insight should result in a fruitful contribution to the positive meaning of human sexuality and religious experience. What the philosopher can contribute to the theologian are new horizons of higher intelligibility within philosophical understanding. In theory, new horizons of philosophical understanding should prevent any form of theological imperialism in the guise of a revealed doctrine or dogma.

[37] Auguste Sabatier (1899 & 2003). *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*. Kessinger Publishing Reprint (p. 41).

Within my philosophical perspective, I have observed that from an historical point of view, common sense thinking characteristic of recent Western cultures has presumed that the "natural order" has been moving from fragmentation or diversity towards some sort of union or unity. However, with the advent of modern technological and digital manipulation of the human environment the understanding of the process of evolution as moving towards union or unity appears to be reversed. From a philosophical point of view direct human intervention has created fragmentary outcomes within the process of evolution thus revealing a multiplicity of different life forms and a variety of metaphysical interpretations. Not unity, but diversity is the product of human-directed evolution. Further, this phenomenon of variety is not only observable in biological evolution, but also in the evolution of ideas. In short, ideas that originated as mythical speculation have become irreversible dogma.

In this essay, I approach philosophical interpretation from a phenomenological perspective. The degree of wisdom that I have attained concerning human existence is in direct proportion to the rigor of my philosophical thinking. Strasser has noted that phenomenology "is not a rigorous science but a rigorous philosophy."[38] Presuming his comment to be correct, I continue my philosophical reflections on the doctrinal and dogmatic interpretations of same sex activity as rigorously as possible in light of the current theology of the Roman Catholic Church.

Theological Realities

By indicating introducing "theological realities" I mean to distinguish between what amounts to a theology of authority and a theology of experience. As theological realties, doctrine and dogma are authoritative statements arising from a scriptural interpretation by church theologians. Experience is the personal

[38] *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences*. (p.276).

authoritative authority by which scripture, both Old and New Testaments is judged. While in contemporary psychological understanding heterosexuality and homosexuality are not separate constitutive elements of the person but in common sense tradition it is often the case that they are. Rather, human sexuality is a single human phenomenon that discloses a continuum of hetero- and homo- sexual activity that must not be understood in a disjunctive manner. In short, there must be a continuity of philosophical and theological support for the Church's doctrine and dogma. From an historical hermeneutical perspective, philosophers and theologians must take into consideration the understanding of the primitive church and the cultural values it inherited from its Hebrew ancestors. Subsequently attention must be paid to the importation of Hellenic ideas into the newly forming Christian culture whose boundaries coincided with the development of the Roman Empire. It was during this era that theology took on significant political characteristics and reflected the Roman Imperial Church. Today, philosophers and theologians living in our techno-digital scientific era must pay serious attention to the experience of the faithful. It is at this juncture of classical and contemporary experience that I have noticed a shift in focus from a narrow cultural and restrictive purpose of human sexuality, to a more expansive and inclusive understanding of the person as a sexual human being. Philosophically, the shift has been from the objective understanding of biological sexuality to a subjective understanding of the person who acts sexually. While homosexual individuals have benefitted from the pastoral care offered to them from this subjective understanding, the same cannot be said of their objective moral status in light of the church's doctrinal and dogmatic teaching.

In Western philosophy rationality has traditionally established the connection between the human and the divine within ecclesiastical understanding. It was accepted as inevitable that there was tension between divine revelation and human behavior in the relationship between God and the faithful as the sacred scriptures record. Human sexuality, as portrayed in the scriptures, is recognized today as an evolutionary product of cultural understanding conditioned by the varying

temporal values of historical development. Modern scriptural studies show that various theologies and attitudes to sexuality are reflected in the Old Testament. Often these theologies are intended to emphasize Israel's differing attitude to sexuality when compared to the sexual activity of its pagan neighbours. Early examples of sexual prohibitions reveal that the Hebrew and Israelite sexual practices were to be in conformity with the revealed mind of God. In particular, Israelite worship was not to conform to the fertility cults of the pagan cultures which surrounded them.

Later traditions characterized by the Christian scriptures emphasized the relationship between sexuality and procreation that necessarily existed between divine power and cultic purity. To this day these themes have been retained in the New Testament even in light of the post-Easter faith in Jesus of Nazareth. And they eventually became the foundation of the Christian notion of marriage including the right use of human sexuality in conformity with God's purpose. Within this historical perspective, St. Paul's personal perspective on inappropriate sexual behavior characterizing the unredeemed man and subsequent turning away from God cannot be dismissed. In any serious investigation of human sexuality within the Christian community of his time, St Paul's experience is a good indicator of the tensions within the Christian community due to the incorporation of Hellenic perspectives into the cultural practices of the Hebrew tradition. From an anthropological perspective such tensions are evident in the Christian community today. Plus, there are the added tensions of foreign philosophies challenging the values of Christian doctrine and dogma. It must be remembered that contemporary questions concerning sexuality were not asked by the biblical authors. Therefore it is not to be expected that contemporary answers can be deduced from scripture. Further, the insights of contemporary scriptural studies cannot be back-projected into the primitive era of the formation of the scriptures.

It should not be forgotten that in a later period of ecclesiastical history, interpretation by Fathers of the Church denounced the deterioration of the state

and religion within the Greco-Roman world. This denunciation was undertaken because such behavior was seen as incompatible with the inherited Hebrew traditions of scripture. It was during this time that St. Augustine's theology rose to prominence. The result was that his sense of sexuality and sinfulness had a strong influence on the sexual teaching of the Church. In a later period still, the scholastic systematization of theology and the development of canon law established a foundation for Catholic sexual morality as it is envisioned today. A study on human sexuality commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America notes that: "Throughout much of Catholic history, at least from the patristic period onward, the general thrust of the Church's teaching on sexual morality is fairly accurately summarized in the formulation of canon law."[39] Thus, canonical objectivity became the preferred philosophical perspective of interpretation by the Magisterium during the High Middle Ages, over a more subjective pastoral approach.

In light of the procreative purpose of sexuality (as given in Revelation), masturbation, homosexuality, sodomy and bestiality were condemned in that they frustrated divine purpose. In the modern period subjective factors within society have appeared which interfere with the objective ideal of a moral response to sexuality. Psychological knowledge, as a subjective understanding of the person, must be taken into consideration alongside the philosophical and theological knowledge of objective doctrine and dogma in addressing human sexuality. Natural law, as understood in the Catholic tradition, has been conceived and developed through the use of Hellenic metaphysical principles which supported the notion of special divine assistance in guiding human knowledge. Hellenic metaphysics is not an existential philosophy, thus its ideas reflect a static (objective) rather than dynamic (subjective) character. Hence, "in the flesh" human behavior could not become foundational as a normative moral code. Foundational norms needed to be ideal norms. While favourable to the established

[39] Kosnik, A., *et al. Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (p. 85).

principles of Canon Law, Hellenic metaphysical philosophy left no opportunity for a relative or existential understanding of ethics.

The question that I raise in this essay from a dogmatic perspective is: are human beings capable of rising above their intellectual prejudices, thus becoming free to choose their preferred sexual expression? Should the following understanding be correct, I am inclined to give a qualified "no" to my question. "Dogma in the sense in which the term is used nowadays in the Church and in theology (a usage that only became definite and universal in the 18th century) is a proposition which is the object of *fides divina et catholica*, in other words, one which the Church explicitly expounds as revealed by God, … in such a way that its denial is condemned by the Church as heresy and anathematized."[40] However, in light of an historical and evolutionary intellectual development, I maintain that it is possible for the church to revise this view. Given such a revision as a possibility other questions arise in light of LGBTQ+ concerns. Is there any specific sexual behaviour universally prohibited? Or, alternatively, is there such an experience as culture-free maladaptive sexual behavior?

Human sexuality functions within the structure of human subjectivity. In humans, gender identity is a phenomenon independent of anatomy that is generated by cultural and environmental perspectives. It is a matter of historical record that in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association no longer classified homosexuality as a mental illness. Thus freed from the stigma of a clinical mental health condition homosexuality became an issue of social identity politics which defined a person. In this context homosexual attraction became understood as the preference and expression for a person's erotic object of desire.

This realization has given rise to attempting a contemporary theological understanding of human sexuality and the role played by homosexuality from a non-clinical perspective. In this context, from my perspective, such understanding

[40] *Encyclopedia of Theology* s. v. "dogma" (p. 354).

calls for a re-evaluation of the philosophical principles that underpin the classical theological understanding of sexuality in the Roman Catholic Church. Without explicit reference to sexuality, Auguste Sabatier has suggested that "the Catholic form of the Church had its history, its greatness, its efficacy, in the past. Other forms are being secretly prepared which will unfold in their turn, to respond to new needs and render to the future ages services no less necessary."[41] With respect to Catholic sexual morality the philosophical aspects of the problem may be identified as; 1) an adequate definition of sexuality for the 21st century and beyond, 2) a necessary revision of the purposes of sexuality in light of postmodern experience, and 3) a moral and ethical reevaluation of sexual conduct. Within this last consideration, I distinguish between morality and ethics in that morality is understood as a revealed theological notion, and ethics is understood a socital philosophical concept.

Such questions have begun to be addressed in the Roman Church within a distinctly Christian anthropological understanding of theology. Scholasticism is no longer the sole, nor the dominant philosophy by which to evaluate sexual experience. The distinctiveness of Christian anthropology is found in humanity's creative intellectual and integrative ability which is in keeping with Vatican II's concept of personhood. To my knowledge there is no known physical cause of human sexual desire since it appears to flow spontaneously from the depth of a person's biological constitution. In the Catholic tradition, sexual behavior is a socially responsible activity to be undertaken by the faithful subject according to particular norms. In the form of guidelines, social responsibility and faithfulness give rise within a moral and ethical consciousness to the evaluation and appropriateness of certain sexual expressions. One's moral consciousness, that is, awareness of sin, will be conditioned by one's intellectual and emotional capacity as acknowledged in light of the dignity of the human person.[42] By virtue of human

[41] *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (p. 142).
[42] Cf. Flannery, *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 16.

existence, sexuality for the Christian faithful is both a moral and ethical doctrinal concern.

Concerning sexuality it is difficult to say anything about the topic that is not provisional in nature. With respect to homosexuality, the 1977 study of the Catholic Theological Society of America stated:

> Homosexuals are rarely singled out for special hostility. … How small a place has been given to homosexuality in the official teaching of the Church is demonstrated concretely by the manuals of moral theology. While all of them describe sodomy as gravely sinful, their argumentation is limited almost exclusively to an appeal to Scripture and theological reasoning on the natural law. Magisterial pronouncements are noticeably meager. While one cannot accuse the Church of conducting an unrelenting persecution of homosexuals, it should be admitted, however, that it did contribute ideologically to the persecution of homosexuals by the state.[43]

Persecution of homosexuals by the state is a political and philosophical issue, not a theological one. In undertaking a critique of the teaching of the Magisterium on the sinfulness of homosexual acts, I am concerned with a philosophical and theological critique, not a political one. And that is the reason for my suggestion that critics ought to look at the philosophy that underpins any doctrinal or dogmatic theological interpretation for clues to possible alternative renderings of the Church's teaching. The recent discoveries concerning human health, both physically and mentally, have revealed the holistic[44] understanding of the human person such that there is a need to modify the traditional preconception of what it means to be a human being from a number of scientific perspectives not usually addressed by classical philosophy. A pastoral or subjective *aggiornamento* (updating), of itself, is not sufficient to address the problem of homosexuality in a contemporary existential context. A reconsideration of the doctrinal and dogmatic

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[43] *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (p. 197).

[44] By "holistic," I mean that a person is more and other than the sum of its constituent parts. It is an idea that I have appropriated from J. C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*, Macmillan (1927).

objective perspective of the church's teaching is also necessary. Ideally, from my point of view, a *ressourcement* (return to the sources) of both the objective and subjective sources of understanding human sexuality need not always require reference to procreation that so many theologians and philosophers insist upon.

§

DOGMA AND THE FAITHFUL "THIRD MAN"

In light of the preceding sections, I introduce some insights from Gregory Baum's perspective of a new sociological model for the church. His model is inspired by the pastoral concerns for the People of God introduced at Vatican II. Baum's model appears in germ form in the concluding section of *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis*,[45] In his book Baum asked how will the new self-understanding of man affect the social organization of the Church? Are we able to foresee in which direction the Church will move? What is significant from my perspective is that Catholics have begun to speculate on these questions from a doctrinal and dogmatic perspective in light of the experiences of the faithful in the 21st Century. My point here is that social reform, or to use ecclesial language, pastoral reform, will lead to the reform of doctrine and dogma that truly enhances and positively accepts the contemporary understanding and experience of the homosexual person. Otherwise, pastoral and dogmatic approaches will not move beyond the current (apparently irreconcilable) ecclesiastical philosophy of "hate the sin; love the sinner" which is characteristic of the church which many homosexuals are beginning to reject. With the appropriate adaptation of doctrinal and dogmatic theology, I am inclined to recognize in Baum's "third man" the faithful LGBTQ+ Catholic who has not abandoned the faith in desperation because of a perceived lack of the church's care for the marginalized. With that in mind, I present this extended quote concerning his "third man" concept to be read in contrast in light of the teaching of the Roman Catechism.

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[45] Herder & Herder (1968, pp. 200-203). The book bears a *nihil obstat* and an *imprimatur*.

In this connection we must examine a wide-spread phenomenon in the Catholic Church that has been called 'the third man.' The term goes back to François Roustang's article 'Le troisième homme,' published in the French Jesuit review *Christus*,[46] which has been widely acknowledged in the Catholic Church. The article describes the creation of a new kind of man in the Church. There are in the Church progressive Catholics who wish to renew Catholic life according to Vatican II, then there are conservative Catholics who prefer the preconciliar Church, and finally there is 'the third man.' Who is this third man? The third man believes that God has acted in Jesus Christ on behalf of all men and that this divine salvation is available in the spirit in the celebration of the Catholic Church. The third man is a Catholic. He regards the Church as his spiritual home. He is deeply attached to the Catholic tradition. At the same time, he takes the institutional Church with a grain of salt. He loves Catholic teaching when it makes sense to him, when it gives him access to new life and enables him to respond to the demands the world makes on him; but if the teaching does not make sense to him, he does not bother with it. He does not wish to argue with other Catholics about it. It would not occur to him to argue with the bishops or the pope. If these teachings make sense to other Catholics, the third man thinks they should accept them whole-heartedly. Similarly, the third man loves the sacramental life of the Church. He participates in the sacraments when they make sense to him, when they deepen his awareness of God's presence and strengthen him in his involvement with other people. But when they do not make sense to him, when they become barriers to worship and community, then he does not bother with them. Again, he does not feel like arguing about it. He makes his own choice; he does not feel guilty about it. He wants to leave other people free to make up their own minds. The third man, moreover, acknowledges the law of the Church. He is no rebel. He believes in law and order. At the same time, he realizes that human life is complex

[46] *Christus* 13, 1966 (pp.561-567).

and that there are situations in which ecclesiastical law does not promote the spiritual well-being of persons. In those cases he feels free from canon law and, if necessary, moves to the margin of the ecclesiastical institution.

What are we to think of the third man? The question is an important one since the ecclesiastical phenomenon is very widely spread in the North American Church. The third man, as first analysed by François Roustang and then acknowledged in Catholic literature, differs from the Christian who is losing his faith. Some people move away from the Church because they find it increasingly difficult to accept that there is a redemptive mystery in human life. Life is identified by them simply with what they see; they find it impossible to believe in the mystery of God present to men. The third man differs also from the Christian who loses interest in the Church because he gives in to his selfish desires. A Christian may become so self-centred that the community of faith and love become a burden to him. He may stay away from the Church because he finds the Gospel a hard road to follow. Again the third man is different from the confused Christian who does not know what to believe anymore. Because of the changes in liturgy and the doctrinal emphasis and because of the uncertainty in regard to much of traditional morality, some Catholics may simply be confused. They want to follow the Church but they no longer know exactly what this implies. The third man, as analysed by François Roustang, we conclude, is neither an unfaithful man, nor the selfish man, nor the confused man. Who, then, is he?

The third man wants to be faithful to the divine presence revealed in Christ and mediated in the Catholic Church. He wants to be sensitive to the Spirit who creates the Church. The third man, it seems to me, is an inevitable phenomenon accompanying the Church's entry into a new spiritual-cultural environment and the re-focusing of the Gospel which this entails. We have shown that Vatican II has begun to re-focus the self-identical Gospel and that the re-interpretation of the Church's teaching in the light of the new

> focus is a gradual process. While we pass through this process we are all more or less third men. As Catholics we accept the Church's teaching, but as we adjust to the new focus of the Gospel, there are many doctrinal positions to which we are, at this time, unable to assign a clear meaning. These doctrinal positions were formulated with a reference to a previous focus. Because the focus has been shifted, these positions no longer make sense as they once did; and because the process of re-interpretation is a gradual one, it may happen that these positions cannot yet be related to the new focus. These positions seem to hang in the air. What is required is more reflection, more dialogue, more theological research, more vital engagement in Christian life. This will speed up the process of re-interpretation. In some important cases, what may be required is the endorsement of the re-interpretation by the ecclesiastical magisterium.

As Catholics we accept the Church's teaching, but as we adjust to the new focus of the Gospel, there are doctrinal and dogmatic positions to which we are, at this time, unable to assign clear meanings. From my perspective this understanding signals an ecclesial stage in the evolution of doctrine and dogma and justifies the renewal of doctrinal and dogma in the Catholic Church. Doctrinal and dogmatic reform can only occur within an ecclesial, not ecclesiastical, frame of reference. Catholics within the LGBTQ+ movement are in exactly this position in the present day. They are unable to assign a clear meaning to their position and status in the Roman Church and many are, in fact, "third men" theologically and with respect to the sacraments.

Accepting that we are all more or less "third men," according to Baum's understanding of the term, I venture to the next stage of my philosophical and theological argument. That is, to a reconsideration of the traditional doctrinal and dogmatic teaching of the church as to its adequacy in relating to LGBTQ+ issues. Personally, I have already begun such a consideration. In Faith *and Queer Consciousness: Philosophical Thinking in a New Key*,[47] I wrote:

[47] Self-published in 2018.

> The moral value of one's decision must alter one's evaluation of sin, which I suggest is necessary if the conclusion to Alfonso Gómes-Rossi's research is to be realized. In undertaking Queer Studies, Gómes-Rossi (2010) concluded that "the best way to get the Church to accept gays and lesbians is using the argument that in essence gays and lesbians are born with those preferences." And, being born with such preferences those "gays and lesbians that want to be accepted by the Catholic Church have attempted to find the answers that justify their homosexuality, with the hope of *undermining the premise* that they are acting sinfully" [my italics].[48]
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> At present, my perspective is that in order to maintain the hope of "undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully" queer individuals will need to embrace a phenomenological philosophy in place of classical scholasticism. In doing so they may realize ultimately their particular goal of revising present theological thinking concerning the justification of their homosexuality activity, i.e., that it is not sinful. Humans cause things to happen consciously or unconsciously. Humans *act* consciously with a goal in mind when they deliberately set in advance what they intend to attain as a practical or moral advantage. Infra-humans, that is, non-human animals also act but their goal is set for them by external circumstances which they cannot practically or morally alter. (In practice, robins do not build eagles' nests. The Inuit can, however, construct igloos or tents.)

In re-considering the traditional doctrinal and dogmatic teaching it is worth consulting *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) the "Declaration on Christian Education."[49] Paragraph 11 states:

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[48] Master of Science Degree, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. "A Longing to Belong: Homosexuals who refuse to leave Catholicism," Chapter Three in *Repair my Church: Discrimination, State Intervention and Acceptance of North American Gays and Lesbians into the Catholic Church*. [accessed via academia.edu] Available in book form: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller (Omniscriptum).

[49] https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-

Faculties of Sacred Sciences

> The Church expects much from the zealous endeavors of the faculties of the sacred sciences. For to them she entrusts the very serious responsibility of preparing her own students not only for the priestly ministry, but especially for teaching in the seats of higher ecclesiastical studies or for promoting learning on their own or for undertaking the work of a more rigorous intellectual apostolate. Likewise it is the role of these very faculties to make more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred sciences so that an ever deepening understanding of sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the development of doctrine.
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> Therefore ecclesiastical faculties should reappraise their own laws so that they can better promote the sacred sciences and those linked with them and, by employing up-to-date methods and aids, lead their students to more penetrating inquiry.

First, as a theological philosopher, I maintain that the Declaration may be embraced by the faithful "third man." It need not be restricted to ecclesiastical students. Secondly, the "intellectual apostolate" is clearly to be contrasted with the "pastoral apostolate" promoted within Vatican II's understanding. In an earlier work in political philosophy, *Christianity and Revolution: The Lesson of Cuba*, Leslie Dewart wrote that: "We do not give our love to the world so that it may come into the Church; the Church was placed on earth so that we might give our love to the world. We do not want the world to embrace the Church; we want the Church to embrace the world."[50] From my perspective there is more to embracing the world than mere tolerance.

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[50] Herder and Herder (1963 p. 196). The Vatican Council was from 1962 to 1965.

I think it is correct to say that the Church has not looked critically at itself, or its doctrine, as was hoped for at Vatican II. However, it did rightly focus on the threatening social and external forces that impinged upon it from the modern world. In light of what I have written above Christian culture, a separate authoritative phenomenon seems to be replacing the institutional church as the preferred agent for pastoral purposes in the contemporary world. That is to say, the adaptations in doctrine and dogma needed in this new social reality have not kept pace with pastoral and social advancements now currently taking place. In an insightful paragraph, Leslie Dewart suggests the possibility of the traditional church (and its teachings) itself become marginalized.

> Hence, I also discard the possibility that *ecclesial* institutions will remain substantially unaltered: the traditional forms of Church structure are far too inadequate to the new needs of the Church. The likelihood of eventual *radical* [Dewart's italics] change in this respect is deducible not so much from the conscious efforts of many insufficiently progressive elements in the Church who wish to refashion (while invariably retaining) all the traditional structures, for their reforms are usually unstable and please no one in the end. It is deducible, rather, from the very strength and intransigence of reactionaries, from the outrance and the self-encapsulation of too many officials in the Church, and from the ineffectualness of the very efforts to retain the situation of the past. If enough ecclesial institutions become irrelevant to the life of the Church, reform will not be needed: the institutions will be by-passed. Thus, radical changes are not likely to come either through revolution from without or through evolution of the institutions from within, but through the marginalization of many (or perhaps most) of the traditional structures of the Church and the creation of novel ones to take their place.[51]

A review of the present North American situation shows that the Catholic Church is becoming marginalized within the greater secular society, both in its structure

[51] *Foundations of Belief* (1969). Herder and Herder (p. 486).

and in its doctrinal and dogmatic teaching. Given the lack of appreciation in sexual matters, especially in LGBTQ+ political issues, other novel ecclesial institutions are rising to take the place of the Roman Catholic Church which are more "gay friendly." The proliferation of the Metropolitan Community Church and the rejection of biblical sexual morality on societal grounds by some Reformed Churches provide evidence of this. As a theological philosopher, it is clear to me that given the critical evaluation that I have undertaken opens the possibility of a re-interpretation of the sinfulness of homosexual acts. The Roman Catechism and the Declaration on Education; the construction of the catechism and its relationship to doctrine and dogma; and the presence of a "third man" among Christ's faithful; properly understood give hope that the sinfulness of homosexual acts, as currently promoted by Catholic doctrinal and dogmatic understanding, will be successfully undermined in due course.